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## *MEDICAL EXAMINER ACTIVITY*

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The staff members of the Medical Examiner's Office are involved in a wide variety of activities commensurate with the mission of the office including responding to and investigating the scene of death, performing postmortem examinations, certifying the cause and manner of death, and providing information and assistance to families. Investigators, who are familiar with the emotional trauma of an unexpected death, communicate directly with the family as do the Medical Examiner pathologists, who review their findings with the families in order to clarify the many questions that accompany a sudden loss of life.

Many cases brought to the Medical Examiner's Office are dealt with in a routine manner, that is, the identity of the deceased is known and next-of-kin can be readily contacted to decide on final arrangements for the deceased, and to assist in the disposition of personal property associated with the scene of death. However, there are frequent cases that are difficult to resolve. In these deaths, at least one of the items above is missing or very difficult to establish. Identification of deceased may require tracing of dental, medical or police records or some individuals may have died leaving no next-of-kin or next-of-kin far removed. Ensuring that all leads have been exhausted in pursuit of next-of-kin can be a very time-consuming but ultimately rewarding effort.

The postmortem examination on each decedent includes the preservation of various body fluids and tissues for microscopic and toxicologic analysis. Photographs are taken of the external and internal portions of the examination, which are available for review at a later date if needed. Photographic documentation is also an essential item in those cases where the pathologist must provide court testimony.

Medical Examiner pathologists and investigators provide testimony in court and at depositions. Staff participate in meetings with police, other interested physicians, and attorneys (both prosecuting and defending) in a variety of criminal and civil cases. A recent addition to the duties of the Chief Medical Examiner is expert medical consultation and testimony in cases involving nonfatal domestic violence assaults.

Autopsy reports and related data from individual investigations are provided to agencies such as Police and Labor & Industries, to prosecuting attorneys, and to other agencies including the Drug Enforcement Administration and the Consumer Product Safety Commission. Reports on drug caused deaths are sent to the Drug Abuse Warning Network (DAWN). Case information is entered into annual databases of the Medical Examiner's Office.

Medical Examiner investigations require frequent contact between the Medical Examiner's Office and various media personnel. Staff are skilled in responding to the media inquiries that occur daily. The Medical Examiner pathologists and other staff participate in a variety of medical conferences, and provide information on a regular basis to law enforcement and medical personnel on various aspects of the role and function of the Medical Examiner's Office.

The data collected and presented in this and other Medical Examiner annual reports also provide baseline information for further analysis. Medical Examiner staff analyzes data to study relevant death investigation topics that have applications in such fields as law enforcement, medicine, law, social sciences, and injury prevention. Examples include infant mortality, teenage suicide, child abuse, effects of positional restraint, investigation of vehicular traffic accidents, and investigation of anesthetic deaths. In addition, the Office participates in teaching medical students, pathology residents, medics and law enforcement personnel.

In 2000, staff participated as speakers at universities, conferences, and training seminars for law enforcement, medical, legal, and social service personnel in the following presentations and lectures:

Richard Harruff, MD, PhD:

- “Domestic Violence Training for Law Enforcement Agencies”  
Kirkland, Washington     Jan 19, Feb 12, Feb 16, Mar 1, Mar 15  
Redmond, Washington     Mar 2, Mar 16, Apr 20
- “Strangulation Injuries”  
Presentation for King County Prosecuting Attorneys, Seattle, WA, March 3
- “Homicide Crime Scene Investigation – Forensic Autopsy”  
University Prep, Seattle, WA, February 4
- “Infant and Child Deaths”  
Basic Death Investigation Course, Washington State Criminal Justice Training  
Commission, Des Moines, WA, March 31
- “Traffic Fatalities”  
Basic Death Investigation Course, Washington State Criminal Justice Training  
Commission, Des Moines, WA, March 31

- "Traffic Injuries and Occupant Kinematics"  
Washington State Patrol Training, Burlington, WA, March 28
- "Autopsy Procedures and the Role of the Medical Examiner"  
Basic Homicide Investigation Course, Washington State Criminal Justice Training Center, Burien, WA, April 27
- "Female Homicide Victims"  
Evidence Collection and The Crime Scene Courses, sponsored by Violence Against Women Stop Grant:  
Kent Training Center, Kent, WA, April 19  
University of Washington, Seattle, WA, April 29  
Bellevue Training Center, Bellevue, WA, May 10
- "Your Role After an Infant Death: Resources for Professionals and Communities"  
Training Workshop Presented by Washington SIDS Foundation, Central Washington University Conference Center, Ellensburg, WA, May 12
- "Traffic Fatalities"  
Lecture for University of Washington School of Medicine Residents in Pathology, May 25
- "Drug Related Deaths"  
Lecture for University of Washington School of Medicine Residents in Pathology, June 1
- "Automobile Accident Reconstruction"  
Certificate Program in Forensics, University of Washington Extension, Seattle, WA, June 5
- "Infant Death Investigation"  
Washington Association of Coroners and Medical Examiners, Tukwila, WA, June 20
- "Medical Examiner Response in Mass Disaster"  
Washington Dental Society, Washington State Criminal Justice Training Commission, Burien, WA, July 29
- "CIREN (Crash Injury Research and Engineering Network)"  
Richard C. Harruff, Robert Kaufman and David Grossman. Presentation for National Association of Medical Examiners, Annual Meeting, Indianapolis, IN, September 15
- "SIDS and Infant Death Investigation"  
Lecture and presentation for Sixth annual Airlift Northwest Fall Conference, Boeing Museum of Flight, Seattle, WA, September 22

- “Strangulation and Pattern Injuries”  
Presentation for “Emergency Department Update: Acute Care for Sexual Assault Patients: Advances in Diagnosis, Treatment and Forensic Investigation,”  
Sponsored by Harborview Center for Sexual Assault and Traumatic Stress.  
Yale Street Landing Conference Center, Seattle, WA September 26  
Center for Urban Horticulture, Seattle, WA, October 2
- “Female Homicide Victims: Twenty Years Experience in Seattle, King County”  
Presentation for International Association of Forensic Nurses Annual Assembly,  
Calgary, Alberta, Canada, October 15
- “Immunocytochemistry in Spinal Cord Injury: S-100 Expression in Human Autopsy Material” E Schultke and RC Harruff. Poster Presentation for Society for Neuroscience Annual Meeting, New Orleans, LA, November 5
- “Autopsy Procedures and the Role of the Medical Examiner”  
Basic Homicide Investigation Course. Washington State Criminal Justice Training Center, Richland, WA, November 16
- “Your Role after an Infant Death: Resources for Professionals and Communities”  
Training Workshop presented by SIDS Foundation of Washington, Yakima Nation Cultural Heritage Center, Toppenish, WA, December 7

#### Kathy Taylor, PhD:

- Speaker for the Career Spotlight: Forensic Anthropology, a one hour presentation to the Emerging Forensic Scientists at the 51<sup>st</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences. February 22, 2000 Reno Nevada.
- Speaker at the Freemont County Sudden Death Seminar in Riverton Wyoming December 6<sup>th</sup> - 8<sup>th</sup>, 2000
- Weiler, Carrie M., and Taylor, Katherine M. "Forensic Anthropology". *In Forensic Medicine Sourcebook*. Annemarie S. Muth (ed). Detroit: Omnigraphics, pp. 179-189. November 1999
- Taylor, Katherine M. "The Effects of Alcohol and Drug Abuse on the Sternal End of the Fourth Rib" Dissertation. University of Arizona May 2000

#### Carrie Kuehn (Weiler)

- C. M. Weiler, K.M. Taylor. “Forensic Anthropology”. In Annemarie S Muth (ed.): *Forensic Medicine Sourcebook*. Detroit: Omnigraphics, 1999, pp. 179-189. September 1999
- C. M. Weiler, K. M. Taylor, R. C. Harruff, A. J. Wilson, F. Mann; “Validation of Anteroposterior Chest X-ray Comparisons for Unknown Decedent Identification”. presented at the 52<sup>nd</sup> Annual Meeting of the American Academy of Forensic Sciences, Reno, February 21-26, 2000.
- “Forensic Autopsy”.  
University of Washington course: Anthropology 322 – Comparative Study of Death taught by Prof. James Green. April 13, 2000.

**Montgomery Nelson**

- “Signs: Forensic Entomology”  
Presentation to the King County Prosecutor’s Office, Seattle, WA. April 27, 2000
- “Signs: Forensic Entomology”  
Presentation to the Washington State Search and Rescue Conference.  
Lewis County Sheriff’s Office. May 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000.
- “Signs: Forensic Entomology”  
Presentation to the Pacific Science Center Docent and Professional Staff.  
Seattle, WA. June 14, 2000.
- “Evidence Recognition and Types of Evidence – Tracking As a Crime/Death Scene Asset”  
Snohomish County Medical Examiner’s Office.  
Everett, WA. July 17<sup>th</sup> & 18<sup>th</sup>, 2000.
- Seattle Times Article: “Cracking cases with bugs”  
Seattle Times published August 10, 2000.
- “An Introduction To Postmortem Changes For The Prehospital Provider”  
25<sup>th</sup> Annual Washington State EMS Conference. August 18, 2000.
- “Bugs! Importance, Recognition, and Collection at Crime Scenes”  
Evidence Recovery Working Group. Seattle, WA. August 31, 2000.
- “Signs: Forensic Entomology”  
Presentation to the Northwest Defenders Association. Seattle, WA. September 14, 2000.

**Nicole Nuckley**

- “Postmortem Interval”  
Presentation to the Annual Washington State Search and Rescue Conference.  
Lewis County, WA. May 19<sup>th</sup> & 20<sup>th</sup>, 2000.
- “Forensic Anthropology”  
Pacific Science Center – Seattle.  
A presentation to young girls aged 10-14 attending Camp Kaleidoscope.  
July 10; July 28; and August 14, 2000.

**Tony Pittenger**

- “Slide Presentation of an Actual Autopsy”  
Presentation to the Citizens Academy of Lynnwood.  
Lynnwood, WA. April 20, 2000.

**Jerry Webster**

- “Role of the Medical Examiner and Cross-Cultural/Religious Issues”  
Presentation to the Harborview Chaplain’s Trainee’s Staff.  
Harborview Hospital. Seattle, WA. August 10, 2000.
- “Role of the Medical Examiner”  
Presentation to the Seattle Police Community Services Officers  
Seattle, WA. August 15, 2000.
- “How ME and Police Work Together”  
Presentation to the Seattle/King County Police Academy.  
Seattle, WA. August 18, 2000.

**Table 12-1**      **Weekly Variation of Deaths Investigated by the King County Medical Examiner's Office**

	TOTAL
Number of weeks studied	52
Mean number of cases assumed	28.96
Maximum in any one week	43
Minimum in any one week	17

**Table 12-2**      **Weekly Variation of Autopsies Performed by the King County Medical Examiner's Office**

	TOTAL
Number of weeks studied	52
Mean number of autopsies	21.57
Maximum in any one week	35
Minimum in any one week	12

**Organization of the King County Medical Examiner Division 2000**

